

BEST PRACTICE 2 Simulations

ACCESS

I used this tactic in my Grade 9 Academic English classes for the To Kill A Mockingbird unit. In terms of access, there's not much you have to worry about because you can adapt it to basically any lesson or subject.



RATIONALE

Simulation activities have been very effective in my experience because the teacher is really able to take students into a certain emotional space without them knowing. The simulated injustice that the teacher subjects the students to makes it quite personal for some of them and lets them get quite invested in the lesson. The "a-ha!" moment is something that they always refer back to. Also, if done right, the teacher can strengthen the classroom community by putting students through an "ordeal" together.

Some of the benefits include:

- *Differentiation*: Exercising the students' feelings lets those who are traditionally turned off by the pen and paper aspect of English to become invested in the lesson. The focus on tangible and intangible rewards can appeal to different types of students.
- *Scaffolding*: Unknowingly, students will experience, albeit on a much smaller scale, a version of the feelings and scenarios of the event that will be explored in the rest of the lesson. Students will therefore be able to grasp the concepts and apply their own experience much more easily as they explore real life examples.
- *Modeling*: Students were learning how to do engaging and interesting oral presentations. This activity was used to model one method that students could use to introduce their topic or grab the audience at the beginning of their presentations.
- *Metacognition*: As the teacher debriefs the modeling aspect of the activity, students are given the chance to exercise their metacognition skills, assessing in what way they could use the same type of simulation in their presentations. Students will ideally be measuring the level of interest they think their presentation might create in comparison to this activity.

PRACTICE

1. Make sure to offer no introduction, explanation, learning goals or agenda in the beginning in order for the simulation to be a complete "vacuum". You may put learning goals and the agenda up afterwards.
2. For maximum effect, plan to hand back a lot of graded work and handouts this class.
3. Before the bell rings, stop students at the door and do not let them sit down; have them take one Easter egg each. There should be at least 2 golden eggs in the bunch.
4. Make a big deal of finding the students with the golden eggs. Play it up to pique their curiosity.
5. If you have a strict seating plan, allow golden eggs to pick their seats and bring their friends as well. If not, allow them to sit at the very front in a special seat if the student prefers. The rest of the students have to sit in their assigned seats with minor reshuffling. Even better, allow them all to be seated and let the golden eggs reshuffle and kick people out of their seats if they wish.
6. Begin the lesson under the pretence that nothing special has happened. At intervals, be showy and deliver handouts to golden eggs right at their desk and then coldly tell the rest of the class to get up and pick up the handouts at a far away station. I was showing a video of Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit". I delivered printed lyrics to the golden eggs and made the rest view the lyrics on the projection screen.
7. Golden eggs always have first chance to answer or ask a question, even when another student has their hand up first.
8. Also, be showy with delivering graded assignments back to golden eggs and announcing that they have first pick of the entire special collection of stickers and taking as many as they want (trust me, my golden eggs

- took full advantage!). Tell other students to pick up their assignments at the station and that it's first come first serve for one roll of not-so-great stickers.
9. The privilege and power given to the golden eggs should be noticeably incremental. The favours that they receive in the beginning may be easy to brush off for many students. At this point, you should really shake them up. Announce, "I have decided that the golden eggs will be deciding the order of presentations next class", which shows the class that you are giving extreme executive power to two seemingly undeserving people.
 10. At this point, there should be grumbling and resentment throughout the class, in which case you should end the simulation and debrief the activity.

Ask the students the following questions: what did the golden egg students receive that no one else did? (*Privilege, power*), How did you all feel? (*Angry, discriminated against, teacher was unfair, confused, despair, resigned to my fate*), What topic am I trying to convey? (*Segregation*)

Ensure that students know that although this activity was meant to make them feel the abuse of power that was integral to segregation, it is in no way as serious or profound. Segregation is a very serious issue and lasted many lifetimes and generations and caused much psychological hurt. Also, apologise to any student that felt slighted by the activity.

Explain how this is a fun and easy way to introduce topics for student presentations and that they should consider activities and games that are similar. Do a think-aloud so that students are aware that they should analyse their topic and draw a 'theme' from it, then think what simulation could represent that theme.

ASSESSMENT

Most students said that it really made them both really understand the topic of the day's lesson as well as the concept of using a hook in their presentation's to make it interesting. I was able to see this as some groups attempted to either incorporate simulations or games into their presentation.

MODIFICATIONS

Since Easter eggs won't be on sale most of the year, you can replace the item with anything you like as long as there is always a "standout" item, although it does help that they can eat the items after.

You can modify this simulation for almost any lesson or topic. For example, I did another simulation where students were given different scenarios of urgency in their groups and they had to write 10 lines of dialogue. After some time, I would pretend that I forgot a detail, which was that the scenarios were taking place in France. I would tell them that they had 2 minutes to translate their dialogue into French. After some struggling, most would give up and I would debrief to demonstrate the feeling of powerlessness that accompanies losing language as a tool.

ADVICE

Depending on the class, the singling out of the golden egg students can be powerful or it can flop. If the golden egg students are shy and wouldn't take advantage of their new power and privilege, then the imbalance won't be as apparent to the class. You may try to rig the simulation so that certain students that you know will unknowingly play it up get the golden eggs to enhance the experience, but that takes a little of the thrill of the unknown out of it!

I think it's also important to gauge the sensitivity of your class. It would be good to be aware of students with IEPs that detail an anxiety issue or other behavioural issues who may not respond well to the pressure or strong emotions possible under the simulation.

The existing community of the class is important as well. If there is a strong community already, students may feel freer to let their emotions be known and the class can experience the activity together. If there is a lack of community, the students may not feel safe being vulnerable in that way.

Lastly, don't overdo the simulations. I did another one two days after and some students were already on guard and knew that the instructions I was giving them were false. Space them out!